

## Message Text

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61

ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SCSE-00 SCA-01 AID-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00

INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-02 USIA-15 PRS-01 SP-02 IO-10

FBOE-00 A-01 /055 W

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R 011600Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9355

UNCLAS PORT AU PRINCE 481

E. O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: SWEL, HA

SUBJECT: FIRE SWEEPS SLUM AREA IN PORT-AU-PRINCE

1. A MAJOR FIRE BROKE OUT IN A DENSELY POPULATED SLUM RESIDENTIAL AREA IMMEDIATELY NORTH OF PORT-AU-PRINCE'S COMMERCIAL CENTER EARLY EVENING FEBRUARY 27 AND BURNED UNTIL ABOUT MIDNIGHT. FLAMES AND SMOKE WERE VISIBLE ALL OVER THE CITY, AND SPECTATORS JAMMED THE FIRE-STRUCK ZONE, ALREADY PACKED WITH FRANTIC RESIDENTS TRYING TO MOVE THEMSELVES, THEIR BEDS AND FEW POSSESSIONS TO SAFETY. NO ESTIMATES HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED YET ON NUMBER OF CASULTIES OR HOMELESS. NO AMCITS HAVE INDICATED THAT THEY WERE AFFECTED BY THE TRAGEDY.

2. THE FIRE OF UNDETERMINED ORIGIN BROKE OUT IN A COURTYARD NAMED COUR BAYAHONDE IN PORTAIL ST. JOSEPH, ZONE ST. MARTIN, NEXT TO WHICH PASSES THE CITY'S MAIN BUSINESS STREET, AVE. DESSALINES

AN HOUR LATER IT HAD CONSUMED HUNDREDS OF HOMES, MOST FLIMSY SHACKS, TIN-ROOFED, CLAPBOARD-SIDED, DIRT-FLOORED STRUCTURES THAT USUALLY SHARE COMMON WALLS. SMALL DIRT PATHS BETWEEN THESE STRUCTURES ARE USUALLY THE ONLY MEANS OF ENTRY OR EXIT, AND FIRE TRUCKS OFTEN COULD NOT PASS THROUGH TO REACH PARTS OF THE FIRE. THE NEIGHBORHOOD IS SURROUNDED BY BUILDINGS OF CEMENT CONSTRUCTION: STOREFRONTS WITH LITTLE SPACE BETWEEN THEM BORDER THE MAJOR ROADS ON THE EASTERN AND WESTERN EDGES, THE

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NORTHERN EDGE CONSISTS OF AN UNBROKEN WALL OF CEMENT FACTORIES

AND WAREHOUSES, AND THE SOUTHERN EDGE SEEMED COMPOSED OF LESS SUBSTANTIAL STOREFRONTS THAN TO THE EAST OR WEST, YET STILL OFFERING FEW ACCESS ROUTES. THE FIREMEN ALSO FOUND THEMSELVES OUT OF RANGE OF HYDRANTS, FORCING PUMP TRUCKS TO DRIVE BACK FREQUENTLY TO AVAILABLE HYDRANTS TO REFILL THEIR TANKS. IT APPEARS THE FIRE WAS EXTINGUISHED ONLY WHEN THE SHACKS HAD BURNED, LEAVING ONLY THE CEMENT STRUCTURES, AND WHEN THE FIREMEN WERE GIVEN A MAJOR ASSIST BY RAINFALL THAT BEGAN ABOUT 2100 HRS LOCAL.

3. WAREHOUSE LEASED BY EMBASSY IS ADJACENT TO THIS AREA. IT WAS THREATENED DURING THE FIRE BUT ESCAPED UNDAMAGED.

4. THE GOH ANNOUNCED THAT PRESIDENT DUVALIER FORMED A SPECIAL INTERMINISTERIAL COMMITTEE TO HELP VICTIMS AS SOON AS WORD OF THE FIRE REACHED HIM. IT IS COMPOSED OF SECRETARIES BEAULIEU (PUBLIC HEALTH), BLANCHET (INTERIOR & NATIONAL DEFENSE), ANTOINE (SOCIAL AFFAIRS), AND PETIT (PUBLIC WORKS), AND DR. VICTOR LAROCHE, PRESIDENT OF THE HAITIAN RED CROSS. THE COMMITTEE DREW UP AN EMERGENCY PLAN TO DISTRIBUTE CLOTHING AND FOOD TO THE VICTIMS AND PROVIDE EMERGENCY HOUSING TO THE HOMELESS. STATE HOSPITAL AND RED CROSS AMBULANCES TOOK INJURED VICTIMS TO THE STATE HOSPITAL FOR TREATMENT. PRESIDENT DUVALIER HAS ESTABLISHED A 300,000 GOURDE IMMEDIATE EMERGENCY FUND TO HELP THE DISPOSSESSED. OF THIS AMOUNT, 100,000 GOURDES WERE LABELED AS HIS PERSONAL CONTRIBUTION.

4. THE FIRE WAS SECOND TRAGEDY TO BEFALL PORT-AU-PRINCE IN FIVE MONTHS, THE FIRST BEING THE FLOODS LAST SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER, WHICH LEFT 2,000 HOMELESS (PAUP 2006; A-163 OF 10/25/74). IN NEITHER CASE (SO FAR) HAS GOH REQUESTED US ASSISTANCE THROUGH EMBASSY.  
ISHAM

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## Message Attributes

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**TAGS:** SWEL, HA  
**To:** STATE  
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